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JPRS: 4251

8 December 1960

BIOGRAPHY OF DOCENT DR. JINDRICH URBANEK

-Czechoslovakia-

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RECEIVED JAN 11 1961
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

19980109 126

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FOREWORD

This publication was prepared under contract by the UNITED STATES JOINT PUBLICATIONS RESEARCH SERVICE, a federal government organization established to service the translation and research needs of the various government departments.

JPRS: 4251

CSO: 1237-S

BIOGRAPHY OF DOCENT DR. JINDRICH URBANEK

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Following is the translation of an article entitled "Seventy;fifth Birthday of Docent Dr. Jindrich Urbanek," by P. Pachner in Pracovni Lekarstvi (Medical Care in Labor), Vol 9, No 8, August 1959, pages 432-433.

On 6 July 1959, Docent Dr. Jindrich Urbanek, fresh, full of life, and having an interest in what is going on, celebrated his 75th birthday.

A native of Opava, he supplemented his studies abroad after studying at the Opava Czech Gymnasium and graduating from the Karlova University Czech Medical School in Prague. World War I drew him away from his diligent preparations. In 1918, after he finished serving in the army, he became the principal surgeon and, shortly afterwards, the director of the former District Hospital at Opava. In 1931, Dr. Pressburger, founder of the Vitkovice Iron Works Health Service (formerly known as the Vitkovice Mining and Smelting Industry chose him as his successor. The formerly German Vitkovice got a Czech director of its hospital and a specialist in internal medicine as its principal surgeon. Pressburger's choice of a Czech doctor, who did not at all seek to conceal his Czech nationality, was not accidental. He relinquished his chair to one in whom he saw guaranteed the safe and correct development of a progressive health service at Vitkovice. This demanded outstanding organizational ability and extraordinary diligence and drive. The Vitkovice Health Service was at that time actually the only true health service in the Republic. It had its own hospital, ambulatory service (both specialized and emergency), and its own hospital insurance plan. The quality of the services offered was outstanding and what is more interesting, the system of services offered

strongly resembled our present day concept of unified hospital service, because there was cooperation between the services provided by the hospital and the mill itself.

The beginnings of Urbanek's activities in the Vitkovice Iron Works fall into the period of rising world economic crisis. Urbanek saw not only medical problems but also the social implication of health problems. He insisted on free treatment and the dispensing of free medicine to the unemployed. From the Vitkovice Iron Works storehouses he exacted goods for the unemployed, demanded an increase in the special Vitkovice fund for TB patients, and led the fight for it. In the hospital he was not at all the typical director and principal surgeon of the internal medicine department. Not only did he conduct scientific experiments in problems of blood circulation, but he also saw the medical problems of the smelting-mining complex and began to direct the fight against occupational diseases. He organized this on a broad basis and in collaboration with the whole hospital collective.

As everything else, Urbanek did this thoroughly, after proper preparation and study. In 1932, industrial relations and the similarity of the combine with which he was entrusted (from the medical point of view) took him to the industrial regions of Germany, from where -- especially from Bochum -- he returned with the most valuable observations. Careful admission examinations of all new employees were instituted and the data recorded on cards, with the area to which they were assigned to work always kept in view. He established preventive physical examinations of those employees subjected to dust, noise, etc. Until today, the central card-files of the Institute of National Health's Vitkovice Iron Works Division contain lists with large and expressive "S," "H," etc., printed on them, indicating the dangers to the health of the individual employee. Many of these are in Urbanek's own handwriting. Interest in the problems of medical care in the working area can be seen from the pressure placed on the technical direction of the plant, which, at that time, began to devote special attention to the problems of occupational hazards and accident prevention.

Urbanek's interest in occupational diseases goes further. During his visits to the former Pelnar Clinic of Internal Medicine in Prague, Urbanek tirelessly consulted Prof Pelnar on the problems of silicosis and stressed the implications and importance of it and of other problems of occupational diseases. There is no doubt that the thoroughness and insistence with which he repeatedly explained the problems of silicosis and other occupational diseases to

Pelnar, very significantly accelerated the establishment of special ambulatory services for occupational diseases at Pelnar's Clinic. J. Telsinger, at that time a young assistant and today a professor and a doctor of medicine, was in charge of this department. Urbanek was greatly interested in the progress of this ambulatory service and participated in its work in the field of pneumoconiosis by advising and drawing on the experiences he obtained through studies both abroad and in his own workplace.

In 1933, primarily due to his efforts, the Society of Czech Physicians in Prague, created a sector for the study of occupational diseases and hazards. At its first meeting, Urbanek delivered an important lecture on silicosis and tuberculosis from the point of view of differential diagnosis.

At this time, in collaboration with others -- among whom were also the late Prof Pelc and the late lawyer Dr. Sochor, from the former Employee Accident Insurance -- he worked for the creation of the State Medical Inspection of Labor.

His function at the Vitkovice Iron Works and his constant relationship with the plant and its technicians helped to impress the basic structure of Urbanek's position on the problems of occupational diseases. He nevertheless approached each individual problem as a physician, but from the very beginning he saw the aim of his struggle for preventive technical measures. He demanded technical prevention that could be achieved only through close cooperation between the doctor and the technician. Persistently and by all possible means he strove for the intensification of such medico-technical cooperation; actively, at his own workplace, by personally trying to convince the doctor-at-large, and through open discussion in the pages of the special issues of Casopis Lekarů Ceských (Journal of Czech Physicians) devoted to occupational diseases.

The first national Congress on Occupational Diseases under the German occupation was mainly due to Urbanek's efforts. It was not called a "convention," but a "course on occupational diseases," because conventions were prohibited during the occupation. There were 220 participants. The meetings were held in the Physicians Building, 21-22 March 1942. The convention dealt with problems of occupational diseases and the most important diseases caused by a particular occupation. Dr. Urbanek lectured at this convention.

The Second Congress on Occupational Diseases, held in 1947, was almost entirely Urbanek's work. It became quite memorable through its form and contents. It was the

first congress on occupational diseases in the free home-land. The festive nature of the convention was intensified by holding it in the old convention hall. Attendance was tremendous, and even foreign guests participated. The convention popularized interest in occupational diseases in our country and established for it a definite stronghold.

Urbanek's interest in the problems of occupational diseases did not stop with his transfer from Vitkovice to Prague, even though in Prague he lacked the opportunity for practical fieldwork in occupational diseases. Even though at the First Surgical Clinic his main occupation was internal medicine, Urbanek remained faithful to his old love, and participated in both the organizational and scientific aspects of this field. Zealously he wrote his monograph on pneumoconiosis -- an extensive compendium of his own findings and those contained in literature, prepared with thoroughness and care typical of Urbanek. However, this life's work has not been published. Nevertheless, such a disastrous fate does not diminish the value of the work, which Urbanek dedicated in its manuscript form to the Clinic on Occupational Diseases and Labor Hygiene in Prague.

On 1 January of this year Urbanek departed from active service. That does not, by far, mean that he has decided to live the life of a "pensioner." To the diligent and zealous man the free time forced upon him is only an opportunity to return to his old love. This year, when the Association for Occupational Diseases, a section under the J. E. Purkyne Society of Czechoslovak Physicians, decided to hold its Sixth National Convention in the Ostrava region and to devote it to the problems of dust prevention, Urbanek was one of the first to respond. Full of interest in the subject, he commended by letter the theme and place chosen and wished to be further informed. We hope to see him at the convention and to be able to show him how greatly we appreciate his contributions to the development of interest in occupational diseases in Czechoslovakia. We hope that he, too, will be glad to see how far his ideas and efforts have gone, how far we have progressed in checking occupational diseases, and how cooperation between the doctor and the technician is progressing for the benefit of the worker. Despite his 75 years, in his interest in the subject and his young elan, he will not be the convention's oldest, even though by the calendar he will be the Nestor of the Convention.

We hope that Docent Dr. Urbanek retains his freshness, interest, and health for many years ahead, so that he can follow all that is happening in the field of occupational diseases and take pleasure in seeing his ideas and plans fulfilled.